

Rep. Tom Udall (NM-03)
H.R. 3673 – Second Emergency Supplemental Appropriations
Floor Statement
September 8, 2005

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my great concern with the situation still being faced by families devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

As needed relief is finally making its way down to the affected region, our thoughts go out to all the victims and their families. Late last week, this body passed a \$10.5 billion aid package that will provide initial funding for immediate and long-term responses. Today, we are passing an additional \$51.8 billion. This funding will cover only a sliver of the final financial toll taken on communities throughout the Gulf Coast and what will be needed for families to re-start their lives. Yet this monetary cost pales in comparison to the immense emotional and human cost that continues to grow.

At the end of the day, the United States government is constitutionally obligated to “insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, [and] promote the general welfare” for all citizens. Particularly during a time of crisis, it is absolutely necessary that these obligations be fulfilled. In that regard, the federal government has failed. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina last week, thousands of families, stranded, injured, homeless, and without basic necessities of water and food waited and waited and waited for emergency relief. For four days, the President, Congress, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) minimized to themselves and to the public the immensity of what was occurring. The very institutions established to serve and protect the American people instead watched and waited as the tragedy grew.

The response of the government to the needs of these communities was demonstrably and woefully inadequate. I am pleased that an investigation has been launched to discover why the government agencies entrusted with providing emergency aid failed to respond in any meaningful way to the grave situation. Ultimately, we must determine what changes need to be made in order to ensure that future relief efforts are not hindered by incompetent management or bureaucratic obstructions, as they were last week. However, we will only find true accountability with a bipartisan, independent commission to investigate what went wrong.

Natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina can never be prevented, no matter how well prepared we may be. However, shifting natural conditions on the planet indicate that we may soon be seeing an increase in such events. In early August 2005, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) released a report stating that environmental conditions guaranteed an increase in destructive and powerful hurricanes along the Gulf Coast. Already this year we have seen an increase in hurricanes along the Gulf Coast. Such a warning has been voiced for some time, and we are now seeing the results if we continue to ignore such information. Additionally, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* predicted this very disaster as recently as 2002. President

Bush's assertion that "no one could have predicted" this disaster is clearly, and tragically, wrong.

Through the generosity of millions of Americans, those families affected by the hurricane are receiving some of the help they need, and I have absolutely no doubt that they will prevail in rebuilding their lives and their community. We must pledge to do all we can to help.

As we proceed with the long-term solutions, we need to make sure we do the right thing here in Congress. It is our job to make choices and these choices reflect our priorities. I hope the majority will acknowledge that many of the choices made in recent years were ill-advised. Together, we need to put the financial resources to work to improve the lives of survivors. It is not the time for business-as-usual, cut-taxes-at-all-costs, short-change-the-working-poor proposals we have come to expect from the majority. We can do better, and we must.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.